

## Eating disorders risk and its relation to self-esteem and body image in Iranian university students of medical sciences

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### Abstract

**Introduction and objectives** Eating disorders are rapidly increasing in young adults. But, a few studies have examined the risk of eating disorders and body image in university students of non-Western societies. The current study aimed to assess eating disorders risk in relation to body image and self-esteem among Iranian university students.

**Method** The participants were 430 students from Tabriz, between April and May 2015. The 26-item Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26), Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Questionnaires were used. EAT-26 score of 20 or more was considered as eating disorders risk cutoff.

**Results** Majority of the students (68 %) were females. The overall eating disorders risk was 9.5 % (7.5 and 10.5 % in men and women, respectively). Further, the prevalence of poor body image and low self-esteem was

34.2 and 16 %, respectively. Neither of the gender differences was statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). In simple logistic regression, there were significant associations between self-esteem, body image, parental education and eating disorders risk ( $p < 0.025$ ). But, after adjustments for gender, age, Body Mass Index (BMI) and marital status, only self-esteem (OR = 0.37, 95 % = 0.16–0.87) and mother's education level (OR = 2.78, 95 % = 1.30–5.93) were predictors of eating disorders risk.

**Conclusions** The findings revealed that low self-esteem and mother's higher education may increase eating disorders risk and the predictive role of body image possibly is by other mediators such as self-esteem. This warrants awareness improvement and developing appropriate interventions targeting self-esteem and self-respect of students.

**Keywords** Eating disorders risk · Body image · Iranian university students · Self-esteem · Eating attitude · Young adults · Body satisfaction · Women's health